

Virginia Back to School Supplies and Clothing Allowance Proposal (draft)

SALT proposes a **Virginia Back to School Supplies and Clothing Allowance (VBSSCA)** for TANF beneficiaries. This proposal is modeled after Operation Backpack programs (backpacks filled with new school supplies for the upcoming school year) that have been sponsored by various civic and faith communities for the benefit of impoverished school children. West Virginia has had a state-sponsored program in effect for 35 years.

We propose that this be made an annual event to assist school children in need, grades Pre-K through High School. The allowance would allow children living in poverty to acquire the needed school supplies and clothing essential for returning to school. By helping Virginia's needy children prepare for school, we can provide at least some of the resources required to help them return to school with confidence and to be equipped for learning. We believe every child deserves access to educational opportunities, as well as basic needs.

In view of the steep decline in TANF caseload consistently each month over the past year and a half, SALT is proposing to use savings from the TANF caseload decline to fund this Virginia Back to School Supplies & Clothing Allowance. As you know, the TANF program is level funded—the same level even when the caseload declines. We propose that the family of each eligible child receive \$100 (annual one-time benefit voucher payment) for each child.

In West Virginia, we understand that this program is very popular with the legislators and merchants, and enjoys widespread community support. Support is so strong that the amount has been increased several times over the years and it is currently being increased to an annual \$200.00 per school age child. Due to the strong support and popularity of the **Back to School Supplies and Clothing Allowance**, it is being expanded to Head Start families and Foster Care families as well. It's an annual one-time benefit voucher payment.